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ABSTRACT

The author summarizes and comments on the recent large-scale assessment of civic education in Canada, "What Culture? What Heritage?" All aspects of the study (see SO 000 280) are reported and discussed. The only criticism centers on the research methodology, especially the attitude measures which the reviewer believes lack rigor. (DJB)

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THE SCANDAL
in Canadian studies

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Comment by George Tomkins

'Scandal' is not a word to use every day, but never was so much evidence accumulated on the state of affairs in so many classrooms in any subject. No need to give up: seven per cent of teachers are showing the way out of the swamp; another 13 per cent are doing good work. MONDAY MORNING contributing editor George Tomkins, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, here summarizes and comments on one of the most significant studies of the decade: *What Culture? What Heritage?* by A. B. Hodgetts, published by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This is the report of the National History Project, a Centennial project financed by Trinity College School, Port Hope.

CANADIAN HISTORY has traditionally been one of the least attractive and least remembered items on the bill of fare in our school curricula. For many adults, the record of what was endured is not so much a jumbled set of jaundiced memories as a *tabula rasa*. Maybe we simply prefer not to think about it. If we are teachers, we may euphorically suppose that matters have greatly improved here, as elsewhere, in our schools. After all, we have heard a great deal about new history materials, 'discovery methods,' new technologies, less prescriptive curricula and, of course, better teachers.

Most of these illusions will be shattered by reading *What Culture? What Heritage?*

This is surely the most comprehensive and thorough study that has ever been made, based on actual classroom observation on a nationwide scale, of the teaching of any subject in Canadian schools. No concerned teacher of 'Canadian studies' (Hodgetts' term for Canadian history, civics and social studies) can fail to be appalled at what the report reveals.

Chapter and verse were compiled from information yielded by the following instruments and procedures:

A. B. Hodgetts

- ☐ a preliminary two-hour interview with 200 persons directly concerned with Canadian studies to determine areas of concern that school and university authorities thought should be investigated
- ☐ a student questionnaire administered to 10,000 students, mainly at the grade 12 level, drawn from all provinces, including both French and English-speaking groups in Quebec
- ☐ an open-ended 15-minute essay written by 1000 students in five provinces
- ☐ one-hour structured interviews with 72 grade 10 boys in Ontario and Quebec
- ☐ one-and-a-half hour interviews with 500 teachers in 10 provinces
- ☐ questionnaires to student teachers in 14 faculties of education, including both French- and English-speaking
- ☐ observations in 951 classes, involving 850 teachers in 247 schools located in 20 cities representing all provinces
- ☐ interviews with principals, perusal of Department of Education publications and current literature

The aim of the National History Project was to generate interest and concern, to further exploration, and to urge that the provinces work together in the mutual cause of national awareness and

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understanding. Such national understanding can be achieved, claims Hodgetts, by 'transmitting the cultural heritage, inspiring pride in the past, encouraging reasonable loyalty and fostering the development of democratic citizens.' The rationale for this aim is expressed in Hodgetts' statement of his personal philosophy of education:

> An educational system that aims primarily at vocational training or social adjustment, or technical and scientific skills, cannot lead to the kind of maturity the modern world demands. To deny the value of formal civic education or to claim that young people are incapable of acquiring it, is to deny a fundamental principle of democracy. . . .

The author's statement of the reasons that prompted Trinity College School to undertake the National History Project further reveal his viewpoint and that of his sponsors.

Apart from the desire to investigate 'the unsubstantiated but very extensive volume of crticism that questions the value of Canadian studies,' the study was motivated by the belief that 'the quality of civic education in any nation is an important factor in moulding that nation's future,' by 'the apparent lack of understanding and sense of national purpose among Canadians as we approached the one-hundredth anniversary of Confederation' and by 'the conviction that the study of Canada and its problems should and could be one of the most vital subjects taught in our schools and . . . could become a much more effective instrument than it now is in the fostering of understanding among [our] people. . . .'

In essence, *What Culture? What Heritage?* is an assessment of civic education — that is, of the influence of formal instruction in developing the feelings and attitudes of young Canadians toward their country and its problems and the knowledge on which these attitudes are based.

Hodgetts has accurately and honestly described his study as 'highly personalized.' There emerges from it a not unattractive portrait of a dedicated teacher, a Canadian of the George Grant school who will seem old-fashioned to many, a gentleman-scholar with tremendous faith in the possibilities of education for promoting civic awareness. The report might best be described as a kind of lament for a nation's history teaching. Hodgetts makes clear that there is much to lament.

In examining courses of study, he found that, with the notable exception of Quebec, all tend to be identical — despite much rhetoric from each province about the need to teach Canadian studies from its own vantage point. Although some, notably Ontario, make a great virtue of providing a variety of textbooks, in practice these cover pretty much the same ground.

Curriculum outlines and textbooks alike contain much antiquated and useless content. Recent history is neglected: after 1930, Canadian studies peter out and courses become amalgams of British, American and European history. Only 37 classes were studying a Canadian topic later than 1931.

In English-speaking Canada, the emphasis (in 69 per cent of the classrooms visited) is almost exclusively on political and constitutional history, on what one pupil called 'nice, neat little Acts of Parliament,' to the almost total exclusion of economic, social and cultural history (81 per cent of the English-speaking pupils polled were unable to name a single Canadian 'cultural leader, poet, artist or writer'). All this is centered on a bland WASP consensus view of the Canadian past.

The heart of the report comprises two chapters, 'The Classroom and What Goes On In It' and 'The Students and What They Get Out of It.' Some of the pithy sub-titles of these chapters sum up the findings: 'Nothing but blackboard and chalk,' 'The bench-bound listener,' 'Straight from the textbook,' 'Discussion or aimless chit-chat.' The structures implied by these rubrics are substantiated by the results of detailed classroom observations. Hodgetts claims to be able to support every statement made about the teaching process from actual data in his files. This is the great strength of his report.

He points out that very few studies of teaching subjects and methods have been carried out by means of actual observations. Thus, recent U.S. studies of political socialization that have emphasized attitude surveys and tests of political knowledge of children make generalizations about the actual and potential influence of schooling in the absence of information about the classroom process itself. We tend to accept this process as given, by assuming that it is already operating at maximum effectiveness or, if not, that its effectiveness cannot be improved.

Where Canadian studies are concerned, Hodgetts offers abundant evidence that existing teaching effectiveness is minimal, as the following findings indicate:

☐ 47 per cent of all pupils knew (or thought they knew) more United States than Canadian history and 71 per cent found the former more enjoyable; eighty per cent of those polled expressed a dislike for Canadian studies.

☐ in only four classes was there any discussion of Canadian historians and their ideas. In other words, there was an almost total neglect of historiography, of any attempt to introduce students to the conflicting interpretations of our past. The accepted view of Canadian history presented in the curriculum guides and textbooks was almost nowhere challenged.

☐ half the classrooms visited had no special provision for the teaching of Canadian studies. Blackboard, chalk, textbooks and standard desks comprised the typical learning environment. Only 109 classrooms (13 per cent of the total) provided good environments and of these, only 33 were real learning laboratories.

☐ in 62 per cent of the classrooms there were no Canadian books other than textbooks and 30 per cent of the schools had no libraries. In 29 per cent of the classrooms there were no maps of Canada of any kind.

☐ audiovisual and other technological equipment was either conspicuous by its absence or, where observed, was lying unused.

☐ more than 80 per cent of the classrooms had no Canadian material displayed on walls or bulletin boards even though the survey was made in Centennial Year.

☐ only 8.5 per cent of the classes, in the supposed aged of involvement, were student-centered and in many of these, aimless bull-sessions were the rule.

☐ no less than 35 per cent of the classes were described by the Project team as actively or passively bored and an even larger proportion were at best going through their paces in a mechanical, albeit more or less positive, fashion. Only 24 per cent of all classes were described as 'keen' or 'moderately keen.'

☐ in what he describes as one of the most serious findings of his study, Hodgetts states that 51.3 per cent of all classes were using the 'assignment method' — questioning based narrowly on pre-reading of the textbook. Next in frequency (and lowest in effectiveness in the judgment of Hodgetts and his colleagues) was the lecture method, used 'day after day as a standard technique, in which there was absolutely no discussion or student participation and in which the content was obviously a mere recital of the prescribed textbook.' In other words, the assignment and the lecture, the two most archaic methods of teaching (condemned in all provincial curriculum guides) dominated nearly three quarters of these Canadian studies classrooms. Rote memorization and regurgitation of facts and of unexamined views were the standard method of teaching.

Other methods used (often in conjunction with the traditional approaches just described) were so-called Socratic questioning and discussion techniques. The former is a pretentious term for a supposed skill which few teachers in fact possess. 'Discussion' is too often aimless chit-chat, based on no factual

knowledge, no advance preparation by pupils (or even by teachers) and no teacher guidance.

The so-called inquiry or discovery method is generally abused, mainly because teachers again lack skill in it but also because it becomes an end in itself, reflecting the dogma of those faculties of education who say: 'It doesn't matter what you teach.' Where this attitude does not give rise to factless, mindless 'discussion,' it results in an undesirable emphasis, in Hodgetts' opinion, on 'current events' from a 'world affairs' viewpoint, to the detriment of contemporary Canadian concerns which he thinks many teachers shun out of a misplaced fear of nationalist indoctrination. On the other hand, in most classes (74 per cent) all contemporary relevance is absent and the dead hand of the past rules.

In addition to careful data-gathering, Hodgetts has added an impressionistic dimension to his findings by the inclusion of vignettes from the classroom. The stand-up-to-answer ritual is still widely practised. In one class, an aimless wrangle on the virtues of Confederation ended with a class vote. The following is a verbatim record of a 'discussion' in another class:

'I say he was a drunkard.'
'Come off it John, he liked his drinks but he wasn't a soak.'
'He got drunk right in public meetings.'
'Yeah, a real old wine-o'
'I'll bet he didn't drink wine. I'll bet it was good Scotch.'
'Hah, just like my old man.'

In Hodgetts' words: 'Meanwhile the teacher sits, benign or powerless or satisfied. "Had a real good discussion in class today. I got the kids going on the drinking habits of old Sir John A." '

Are there no bright spots in the teaching of Canadian studies? One-fifth of the classes were described as good. Between 10 and 15 per cent of the pupils were seriously interested in and well informed about Canadian affairs. Eighty per cent of the pupils polled had positive feelings towards Canada, usually related to a love for the land itself.

Incidentally, in view of the fact that Hodgetts defines 'Canadian studies' fairly broadly, even though his survey is called the National *History* Project, it is slightly surprising that there is almost no mention of geography. It is probably in the extensive courses on the geography of Canada, now increasingly popular, that some of the deficiencies of other Canadian studies are made up. Such courses are by definition almost entirely oriented to the contemporary scene, concentrated more or less exclusively on Canadian topics and are likely to be more problem-centred. Geography teaching materials are also easier to come by. Hodgetts found that French-Canadian pupils had a more positive, even passionate identification with their past than did English-speaking pupils.

The best classes observed were taught by a technique termed 'the dialogue' in his study. These were judged superior in terms of 'the extent and quality of both student participation and content.' The students were well prepared by means of carefully planned reading assignments given by a competent teacher who knew the sources and guided his charges to controversial, opposing and supplementary viewpoints. It was assumed that students would master the facts themselves and that clarification and interpretation of them would occur in discussion.

Although students did most of the talking, these 'dialogue' classes were not totally student-centered: the teacher played a guiding role and participated himself on appropriate occasions. Without exception, these 61 best classes were studying a topic in depth. Real intellectual skills were being developed as students improved their reading ability, learned to think for themselves, made factual evidence work for them, weighed and evaluated evidence and increased their powers of oral and written expression. Finally, these classes met most of the requirements of good 'discovery' or 'inquiry' teaching methods.

We can derive small comfort from the fact that 7 per cent of the classes fell into this 'best' category or that another 13 per cent were regarded as 'good.' Where lies the responsibility for the fact that 80 per cent were less than good and were, in fact, mostly downright awful?

As always, the teacher is a convenient whipping boy and, indeed, his image in this report is far from flattering. Many teachers were found to be lacking positive personalities and had been non-participants in university activities. In terms of personality, a distressing number (11 per cent) were martinets in the classroom while, at the other extreme, many were quite unable to maintain a semblance of order. Only 7 per cent were classified as excellent teachers, that is, mature personalities of academic competence. The low self-esteem of many teachers is disturbingly clear from Hodgetts' observations. As a group, the Canadian studies teachers surveyed were remarkably parochial: 80 per cent were born and educated in their home provinces and were teaching within 100 miles of their places of birth. The lack of mobility of student teachers was noted by Hodgetts as a significant factor in retarding their interest in Canadian affairs. It also belies the swinging image of our youth as more *au courant* with the country than are their elders. (This is but one of several findings that undermines the conventional unwisdom being purveyed about youth by the media. Thus, 70 per cent of the pupils surveyed claim to get most of their current affairs knowledge, not from television, but from the newspapers which they read on the average four times a week. Hodgetts found no basis for believing that our pupils are better informed and more 'involved' than their elders.)

In terms of academic preparation, Hodgetts found that half the elementary school teachers surveyed held minimum certification, 28 per cent of all teachers of Canadian studies had taken no university course in the field and 52 per cent had taken but one course. Only 4 per cent had special training in Canadian studies. In these circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that 80 per cent do not keep abreast of the field.

An important point made by Hodgetts is that teachers do not use the freedom they have. Canadian studies would be immediately improved if teachers showed more initiative. At the most rudimentary level, for example, there seems little excuse for the overwhelming lack of bulletin board displays. Nevertheless, it is easy to blame the teachers and Hodgetts is entirely right to lay the chief responsibility for the deficiencies of Canadian studies at the doors of our universities.

A major conclusion of his study is that all the weaknesses he observed in the schools are found in the higher institutions. It is a notorious fact that teachers tend to teach as they have been taught. It is clear that faculties of education and arts alike are equally to blame for perpetuating text- and bench-bound teaching.

The former do little or nothing to train teachers in discussion techniques. The various inquiry, reflective thinking and analytical models developed in the United States by Oliver, Shaver, Fenton, Massialas, Taba, Metcalf and others need to be much better known in our universities, including departments of history which are usually completely ignorant of techniques that could greatly enliven their own course presentations. Hodgetts may be quite right to have reservations about the wholesale importation of U.S. social studies projects, but he should recognize much more than he does the value of many teaching techniques developed in these same projects.

He found that faculties of education generally neglect any philosophical approach to subject-matter while wasting time on fussy methodology. An indiscriminate obeisance to the virtues of change occurs at the expense of

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attention to the forces of permanence, stability and continuity in society. It is prematurely assumed that nation-states have outlived their usefulness and that teaching should concentrate exclusively on citizenship in the world community. A false dualism is set up between domestic issues and foreign affairs. The social context of education is neglected. Political education is likewise neglected in the training of teachers.

The academic historians in the faculties of arts who were surveyed relied overwhelmingly on textbook and lecture methods. Where they did not purvey a set view of the Canadian past, devoid of any attention to historiography, their teaching was often dominated by a corrosive skepticism or relativism that must reinforce the mindless liberalism of many teachers. A kind of rigid scholasticism was accompanied by a disdain for the schools and for the problems of teachers, if not for teaching itself.

School administrations also bear some responsibility for the state of Canadian studies. Nearly half the principal teachers interviewed showed little interest in supporting the field. A large proportion indicated frankly that they did not consider Canadian studies important. The efforts of inspectors and consultants focus on the trivial, on such questions, for example, as the best colour of chalk to use in blackboard sketches.

What solutions does Hodgetts propose? There is an obvious need for better training of teachers at both the pre-service and in-service levels. His chief recommendation, however, is that a Canadian Studies Consortium be established as an interprovincial but politically independent organization with the initial impetus coming from the Council of Ministers of Education. It should consist of a national executive committee to serve as a data bank and a clearing house for the activities of several regional centres exclusively concerned with the development and distribution of Canadian studies materials and teaching strategies. Final decisions regarding the selection and use of the materials should rest with each province. The executive committee would function, via the regional centres, in cooperation with departments of education, school boards, teachers' organizations, faculties of education, universities and interested lay groups.

Hodgetts' challenge has already been taken up by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education which has recently established a Feasibility and Planning Committee for a Canadian Studies Programme. His report is being used as a basis for discussions with various interested individuals and groups in the 10 provinces to consider the establishment of a network of project-centres across Canada to perform the functions suggested for the proposed Canadian Studies Consortium.

In conclusion, it may be noted that I have generally reviewed Hodgetts' report within the context of his assumptions about what Canadian studies should be. Many readers will reject outright the nationalist bias on which these assumptions seem to rest. Others will feel that his definition of Canadianism provides ample scope for their own interpretation of how Canadian studies should be taught. In fairness to both these views (and to Hodgetts himself), his definition of Canadianism should be stated here:

> [The] basic premise is that, within the almost limitless diversity of our open, pluralistic society, Canada is unique for at least one very important reason. It is different from all other political communities because of the particular set of problems its people face at any given time. These problems have grown out of the history of Canada; the passage of time will bring changes in their scope and intensity. Many of them are shared with other industrialized countries; some are shared with all mankind. But others are singularly Canadian and the realization of this fact helps to give us, however vaguely, a sense of uniqueness, a sense of belonging. By continuing to live in Canada, we tacitly agree to face these difficulties and to participate in or at least to accept their solution. The extent to which Canadians are aware of their identity depends on the depth of their understanding of these problems.

The trouble with this unexceptionable statement, is what it seems to mean as Hodgetts interprets it throughout the report. Many who, like myself, consider themselves good Canadians will hope that we continue to lack a national purpose. They are likely to feel, with Bruce Hutchison, that our 'dumb Canadianism' is one of our assets and that we should view with suspicion any effort to make it explicit. They may note that on those rare occasions when English-speaking Canadians have identified passionately with their tradition, it has usually been an expression of their considerable uncharitable impulses. Can the diversity of the total Canadian tradition result in anything but a strong regionalism? It is one of several paradoxes in Hodgetts' position that the schools are accused of reinforcing regionalism while at the same time teaching a bland consensus.

The 'sharply opposed views of our history' that Hodgetts observed in the classrooms of the two cultures are surely more a symptom than a cause of 'the entirely different value systems.' These systems are an inevitable outgrowth of the traditions and historical experience of each group. From them arise the forces of what the psychologist, J. M. Stephens, has called 'spontaneous schooling' — the obscure, unconscious but powerful constellation of motivations and dispositions with which the child enters the classroom. The recent improvement in English-speaking attitudes towards French-Canadian aspirations probably owes little or nothing to our schools. On the contrary, this improvement is likely to make our classroom efforts to reduce the value conflict more possible and meaningful.

When Hodgetts tells us, in alarm, that the political cynicism he found reflects the fact that 'the federal government is in deep trouble with a great many young Canadians,' he is only saying that our youth shares, with their parents, 'the distemper of our times' — with much good reason, many of us would add. It is too early to know whether the events of June 25 will allay our cynicism, but the unprecedented interest in politics in 1968, the excitement of Expo in 1967, the publishing output of Canadiana of all kinds suggest that there is much less apathy about our national affairs than Hodgetts supposes.

A final word about the methodology of this study so far as it can be inferred from reading the report. Possibly the real cynicism of the students was directed at the naiveté of an investigator who could take so seriously the finding that 25 per cent of them expressed a lack of pride in Canada's past. Attitudes are notoriously difficult to measure and it seems highly questionable that the design and methodology of this study make this conclusion, and many others, either significant or surprising.

Hodgetts deliberately chose to present a 'highly personalized' report that makes a hard-hitting impact on the reader. This would not have been diminished by a greater sophistication in obtaining and treating his data. There is no evidence that Hodgetts is aware of the literature on attitude and personality studies or of various techniques of analyzing classroom interaction that are now emerging in educational research.

Maybe he should have used the expertise of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education earlier than he did.

However, this remains a landmark report and the above *caveat* does not reduce the force of its conclusions that Canadian studies, as viewed here, are in a dismal state in our schools. No disagreement with Hodgetts' bias or method will prevent every self-respecting teacher from hoping that something drastic will be done about it.